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The Philippines

Anatomy of a Revolution

Forbearance, diplomatic skill and some luck led to the end of the Marcos era

"Senator, what do you think? Should I step down?"

It was the second time that Paul Laxalt, the Nevada Republican and personal friend of Ronald Reagan's, had spoken that day with Ferdinand Marcos, the beleaguered President of the Philippines. At 2 o'clock (EST) last Monday afternoon, Marcos telephoned Laxalt, who had visited Manila in October as a special emissary, with an urgent question: Was it true, as U.S. Ambassador Stephen Bosworth had told him, that President Reagan was calling for a "peaceful transition to a new government" in the Philippines? While the two men talked, Laxalt said later, it became apparent that Marcos was "hanging on, looking for a life preserver. He was a desperate man clutching at straws." He asked whether the reference to a "peaceful transition" meant he should stay on until 1987, when his current term was originally supposed to end, and he wondered whether some sort of power-sharing arrangement with the Philippine opposition could be worked out.

Marcos spoke of his fear that his palace was about to be attacked, but seemed determined to stay on as President. At Marcos' request, Laxalt then went to the White House, where he discussed the con-

versation with Reagan and Secretary of State George Shultz. The President repeated his desire for a peaceful, negotiated settlement in the Philippines and said once more that Marcos would be welcome if he decided to seek sanctuary in the U.S. But Reagan said he thought the idea of power sharing was impractical and that it would be undignified for Marcos to stay on as a "consultant."

At 4:15 p.m. Laxalt called Marcos, who immediately asked whether Reagan wanted him to step down. Laxalt said the President was not in a position to make that kind of demand. Then Marcos put the question directly to Laxalt: What should he do? Replied the Senator: "Mr. President, I'm not bound by diplomatic restraint. I'm talking only for myself. I think you should cut and cut cleanly. The time has come." There was a long pause that to Laxalt seemed interminable. Finally he asked, "Mr. President, are you still there?" Marcos replied, in a subdued voice, "Yes, I'm still here. I am so very, very disappointed."

In Manila it was after 5 o'clock in the morning of the longest day of Ferdinand Marcos' life. Before it was over, he would attend his final inauguration ceremony, a foolish charade carried out in the sanctuary of his Malacañang Palace. That evening, a ruler no more, he would flee with his family and retainers aboard four

American helicopters to Clark Air Base on the first leg of a flight that would take him to Guam, Hawaii and exile.

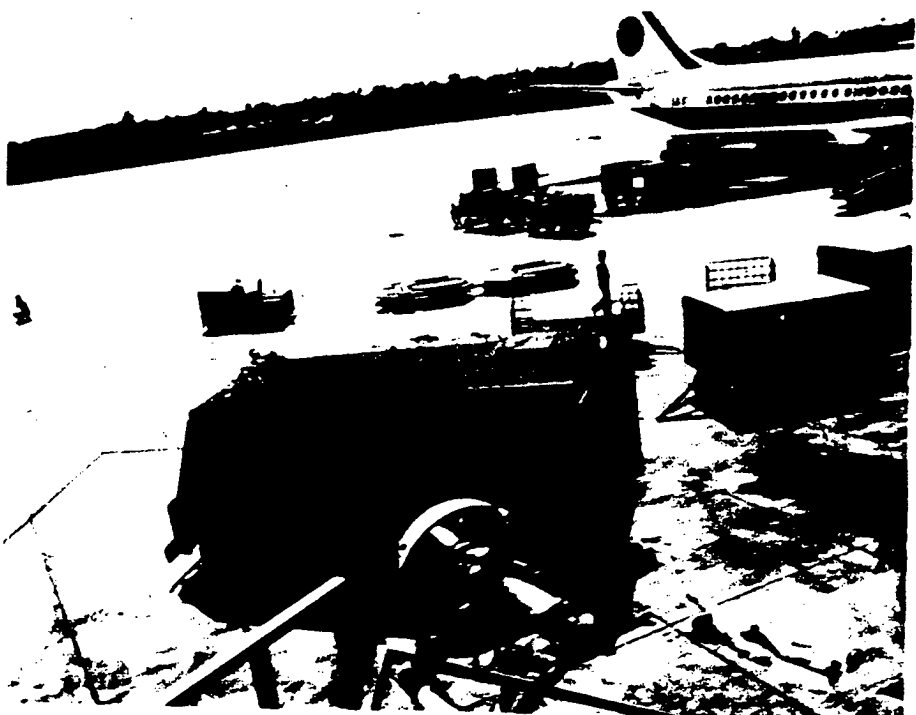
That same night, to mark the end of his increasingly authoritarian 20-year rule, millions of his countrymen would stage one of the biggest celebrations in the Philippines since its deliverance from the Japanese in 1945 and its independence from the U.S. in 1946. At the Malacañang Palace, giddy with excitement, hundreds of Filipinos would scale fences and storm their way through locked doors in order to glimpse—and in some cases to loot—the ornate Spanish-style palace that had served as Ferdinand and Imelda Marcos' seat of almost absolute power.

If there was something inexplicable about the mass phenomenon that rescued the island nation from a failing dictatorship, enabling thousands of unarmed civilians to protect one faction of the armed forces from the other, there was no doubt when the process began. It was Aug. 21, 1983, on the tarmac at Manila international airport. On that day, Opposition Politician Benigno ("Ninoy") Aquino Jr., 50, returning from three years of self-imposed exile in the U.S., was slain by a single bullet as he stepped off a jetliner into a crowd of soldiers and well-wishers. Though Marcos tried to put the blame on Communist agitators, one Filipino civil-

AUGUST 21, 1983

MURDER ON THE TARMAC

Returning home after three years in exile, former Senator Benigno ("Ninoy") Aquino Jr. hoped to resume his opposition to the rule of President Ferdinand Marcos. As he was led down the stairway from the plane, he was struck and killed by a single shot. His body lies on the right. Aquino had a statement he intended to read at the airport: "It is now time for the regime to decide. Order my immediate execution or set me free."



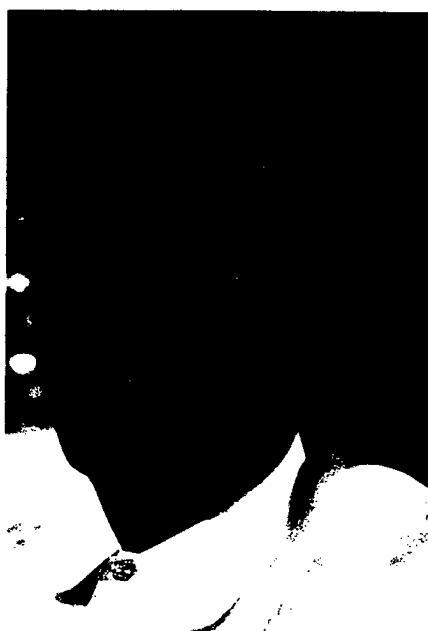
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ian and 25 members of the military, including General Fabian Ver, the armed forces Chief of Staff and Marcos stalwart, were indicted on charges of conspiracy to commit murder. The defendants were acquitted in December after a yearlong trial, but few Filipinos doubted their guilt.

The Aquino murder shocked and angered the country, sparking popular demonstrations and intensifying the disaffection with Marcos. It infuriated thousands of professional military men, who bitterly resented the politicization that the armed forces were undergoing and the hatred that this process was engendering. Of the assassination, Colonel Gregorio Honasan says today, "From a military viewpoint, it is technically impossible to get inside a cordon of 2,000 men, so this reinforced our belief that nobody in government could be safe."

The assassination produced a sharp increase in the size and intensity of Communist guerrilla activity by the military organization called the New People's Army. Though the insurgency is concentrated on Mindanao and some other southern islands, it spread after the Aquino assassination to 60 of the country's 74 provinces. In addition, the killing of Aquino created a nationwide crisis of confidence that caused the already stagnant economy to spiral downward, even as most other Southeast Asian nations were prospering. After the assassination, says an American official, "all these concerns took a quantum leap."

Two of the most important elements of Philippine society, the church and the military, began quickly turning against Marcos. The Archbishop of Manila, Jaime Cardinal Sin, is a powerful figure in a country nominally 85% Roman Catholic, and his opposition to Marcos was clear. He increasingly and openly encouraged opposition political figures.



A wistful, defeated ruler near the end

"I am so very, very disappointed."

The revolt in the armed forces began to take shape as long ago as 1977, when a power struggle within the Marcos government eroded the influence of the President's longtime political ally Defense Minister Juan Ponce Enrile. "It began as a self-defense action," recalls Navy Captain Rex Robles, a spokesman for the Reform the Armed Forces Movement, which Enrile now confirms he clandestinely helped establish. Realizing that he was being pushed aside in a power struggle with General Ver, Enrile, a Harvard-trained lawyer, began to work secretly to protect himself and lay the groundwork for the inevitable post-Marcos period.

Late last fall events began to move

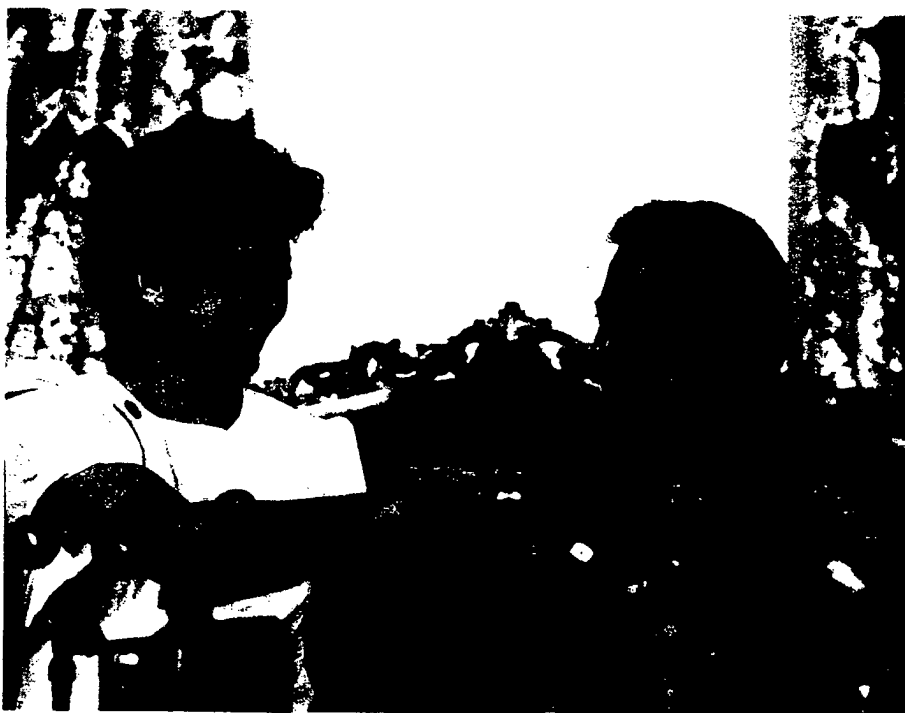
rapidly. In November, Marcos declared that he would hold a special presidential election to convince the Reagan Administration that he still enjoyed popular support. A month later, immediately following the acquittal of Ver, Corazon Aquino announced that she would challenge Marcos for the presidency. Cardinal Sin then helped persuade former Senator Salvador Laurel to join the Aquino ticket. In the meantime Enrile had been building his reform-movement, a highly visible band of about 100 well-trained soldiers whose aim was not to topple Marcos but to pressure him to reorganize the military. Throughout the election campaign, while Enrile publicly supported Marcos, his reformers conducted a crusade for honest voting that angered the President and the Ver faction in the military. The reformers in turn were enraged by the strong-arm methods used by the pro-Marcos forces in the vote counting, and even more by the assassination of Evelio Javier, a leading opposition figure. Nonetheless they remained inactive because they wanted to appear impartial. The military men had already established links with Corazon Aquino, and before the campaign had helped train her security detail.

Once the voting was over, the reformers prepared to take a more active part in the efforts to topple Marcos. By this time they had won the support of some of the Marcos family's closest security forces. Says one reformist: "I don't think the President thought that so many of his praetorian guards would turn against him. He thought money could buy loyalty. He underestimated the basic decency of Filipinos." The group tested palace security by smuggling cars filled with empty boxes into the palace grounds. Since nobody bothered to stop them, they realized they would be able to bring in ex-

DECEMBER 11, 1985

A UNITED OPPOSITION

"Cory! Cory! Cory!" her supporters cried as Corazon Aquino, widow of the slain Benigno, entered the race for the presidency. After a few days of confusion, former Senator Salvador Laurel abandoned his own plans to run for the top spot and agreed to be the candidate for Vice President on a unity ticket. Jaime Cardinal Sin, the Roman Catholic Archbishop of Manila, played an important role in getting the two together.



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plosives if they should choose to do so.

Two weeks ago the reformers learned that they were in imminent danger. As the first step in a byzantine crackdown, Marcos arrested a group of soldiers. Though these troops were not members of the reform movement, the reformers theorized that the men would be used to incriminate them. The rebels suspected that the threatened crackdown was a maneuver by Ver and his supporters to reinforce their links with Marcos. At the same time, however, there were reports that some sort of coup might actually be in the making.

Immediately the reformers decided to accelerate their plans. They reached Enrile, who was sitting in the coffeehouse in the Atrium building in Makati, and informed him of what was happening. On Saturday, Feb. 22, Enrile resigned from the government and announced that he was joining the opposition forces. Some of Enrile's reformist colleagues tried to convince him that such a move would merely forewarn Marcos of the group's intentions, but he insisted, "I just cannot do this to the President otherwise."

The decision made, he sought Lieut. General Fidel Ramos' help. "I called Eddie. I had never discussed anything with him over the years, except in terms of the reform movement's general lack of aggressive intentions and its interest in institutional change. I told him, 'My boys are in this predicament, and I will have to be with them. I would like to find out whether you will join us or not.' General Ramos said, 'I am with you all the way.'"

At the moment of showdown, Cardinal Sin again played a crucial role. He publicly praised Enrile and Ramos, and called on the Philippine people to take to the streets in peaceful support of them. Radio Veritas, the Catholic station, became the unofficial broadcaster of the re-

bellion, reporting on military units that had joined the opposition and giving instructions to crowds.

In the end the ailing Marcos, who is reported to be suffering from a form of systemic lupus erythematosus, a disease in which human antibodies attack the body's tissue, especially the kidneys, was woefully uninformed as to what the reformers were really up to and how much support they had gained. Says Enrile: "Evidently the President was a captive of a group in the military. That was the sad thing about it."

Reagan Administration policy during the final hours of the Marcos reign was set during a meeting last Sunday morning in the Bethesda, Md., home of Secretary of State George Shultz, at which the President's special envoy, Philip Habib, who had returned from Manila only hours before, presented a report on his trip. In attendance were Caspar Weinberger, the Secretary of Defense; Admiral William Crowe Jr., chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff; Robert Gates, deputy director for intelligence of the Central Intelligence Agency; and John Poindexter, the National Security Adviser. Also present were three officials who had been preoccupied with the Philippine crisis for months: Michael Armacost, Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs; Paul Wolfowitz, Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs; and Richard Armitage, Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Policy.

The group agreed on four principles, which were subsequently presented to President Reagan: Marcos' ability to govern with the consent of his people had ended; any effort by him to crush the reform movement would only worsen the situation; it was of great importance to the

U.S. that force not be used; and it would be damaging to U.S. standing in the world if Marcos were treated like the Shah of Iran, who was admitted to the U.S. for medical treatment but was not permitted by the Carter Administration to remain. As it turned out, Marcos was less worried about the fate of the Shah than about what happened to Ngo Dinh Diem, the South Vietnamese President who was assassinated during a 1963 coup. Says one senior American official: "He wanted to make sure he did not leave with a bullet."

President Reagan, who had once solidly supported Marcos, quickly accepted the four-point policy. Reagan's views had already been shifting during the previous three weeks. Indeed, in response to Marcos' deteriorating situation, he had moved rapidly from his dismaying remark after the election that there had probably been voting fraud on both sides to a White House statement condemning the election as fatally flawed by fraud, most of it on the part of the Marcos forces.

At a Sunday-afternoon meeting of the National Security Council, Special Envoy Habib reported flatly, "The Marcos era has ended." Shultz summarized the views of the participants by saying that "not a person here" believed Marcos could remain in power, adding, "He's had it." President Reagan agreed but remained concerned about the fate of Marcos. Said Reagan: "We'll treat this man in retirement with dignity. He is not to wander."

By then the Administration was emphasizing as strongly as possible that Marcos should avoid a military showdown. On Saturday, Reagan sent the Philippine leader an appeal not to use force to remain in power. Next day he dispatched a second message, advising Marcos that he as well as his family and close associates was welcome to live in the U.S. White House

FEBRUARY 7, 1986

BATTLE OF THE BALLOT BOXES

After the election, the results were immediately contested. Supporters of the candidates often clashed as returns were carried to central locations. Amid charges of violence, fraud and tampering, both Marcos and Aquino claimed victory. Members of a 20-member delegation of U.S. observers noted widespread cheating. Said Senator Richard Lugar: "The count is being shaped to what the President needs."



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Spokesman Larry Speakes announced that American military aid to the Philippines would be cut off if troops loyal to Marcos used the army against the Philippine reform movement forces led by Enrile and Ramos. On Sunday evening, Shultz and Under Secretary of State Armacost met at the State Department with Blas Ople, Marcos' Minister of Labor, who had come to Washington to plead the Philippine President's case. According to Ople, the American diplomats gave him a blunt message: Marcos had lost control of his army, the troops under General Ver were ineffectual, and if Marcos did not step down, the country could be heading for civil war. A similar statement was sent to the U.S. Ambassador in Manila, Stephen Bosworth, who took it to Marcos.

It was early Monday morning before Ople finally managed to talk to Marcos by telephone. The Philippine President was angry that while his palace was being threatened and his television station taken over, the U.S. was telling him not to defend himself. He told Ople that Mrs. Marcos was there beside him and "she doesn't want to leave." Later that day, at about the same time Marcos was calling Senator Laxalt, Imelda Marcos telephoned Nancy Reagan. The message was the same: Mrs. Reagan urged the Marcoses to avoid bloodshed, expressed concern for their family, and assured Mrs. Marcos that they were welcome to come to the U.S.

The Administration was worried about General Ver, who on Monday was still in a position to attempt a last-gasp military move. There were reports that he was about to send tanks to attack the reformers. Accordingly, the National Security Council sent a message to Ver advising him that it would not be in his

"interest" to make a military move. Translation: if he called out troops, he would forfeit his chance of being included in the Marcos rescue operation. The warning was heeded.

In the period following the Aquino assassination, American policymakers had become increasingly concerned about the Philippines' rapid political and economic decline. One particular concern was the future status of the two large U.S. military installations in the Philippines, Clark Air Base and Subic Bay Naval Base. The leases on those facilities will run out in 1991, but the U.S. hopes that they can be renegotiated. Following a 1984 policy review by the National Security Council, which concluded that Marcos would "try to remain in power indefinitely," the Administration began to work for economic, political and military reform in the Philippines. Shultz laid down the overriding principle: the U.S. must be loyal to the institutions of democracy, not to Marcos.

In October, Reagan sent Senator Laxalt to Manila to tell Marcos that changes had to be made. Said Laxalt last week: "He was getting messages through State, but he just wasn't believing them." Laxalt told him that the Philippine army had to spend more time dealing with the Communist insurgents.

Pressure on Marcos was also building in the U.S. Congress. Senator Richard Lugar, Indiana Republican and chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee, who headed an official American team of poll watchers that observed the elections, concluded that there had been many instances of fraud, vote tampering, violence and intimidation by Marcos partisans. In

a telephone conversation with Marcos just after the voting, Laxalt observed that certain aspects of the elections had been "rather strange," such as reports that Marcos had carried one province by a vote of 13,000 to 0. That was not a province, it was a precinct, said Marcos, and "it was family." When Laxalt answered, "I doubt very much if I ran in my home district I would get all the votes of my family," Marcos, who knew that the Senator's parents were French Basque immigrants, replied, "Well, Filipinos are more clannish than you independent Basques."

Washington's fear of a bloodbath was not unfounded. Early Monday morning a crowd of Marcos supporters armed with batons and tear gas moved toward Camp Crame, where the reformers were gathered. Over transistor radios, Marcos was heard vowing, "We'll wipe them out. It is obvious they are committing a rebellion." And over Radio Veritas came Enrile's reply, "I am not going to surrender."

Tanks arrived. When helicopters from the 15th strike wing of the air force began circling overhead, it looked as if the reformist rebellion was all over. If the choppers had fired into the Enrile-Ramos headquarters, the reformers would have been helpless. But then the choppers landed, and out came airmen waving white flags and giving the "L" sign for *laban* (fight), a symbol of the opposition. Suddenly the crowd, realizing that the air force was now defecting, went wild.

Perhaps the most ominous moment came that same morning, shortly after Marcos announced on a televised news conference that he was declaring a state of emergency. At that point his armed forces Chief of Staff, General Ver, whispered to Marcos in a voice that was audible to the

FEBRUARY 23, 1986

REBELLION IN THE ARMY

Defense Minister Juan Ponce Enrile had secretly helped organize a military reform movement. After hearing news of a threatened crackdown on the group, Enrile openly broke with the dictator and went over to the opposition. Also joining the rebellion was Lieut. General Fidel Ramos. The Enrile-Ramos defection was the crucial event in the final transfer of power.



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whole nation. "Sir, we are ready to annihilate them at your orders . . . We are left with no option but to attack." Marcos did not respond. Whether he knew it or not, his failure to move swiftly against Enrile and Ramos, one of the more honorable acts of his tarnished presidency, had already cost him the office he was fighting so desperately to retain.

Instead he went on with his press conference, but at 8:47 he was interrupted in mid-sentence as the government-run television station, Channel 4, suddenly went off the air. When it reappeared three hours later, the newscaster jubilantly declared, "This is the first free broadcast of Channel 4 . . . The people have taken over." Beside him was Colonel Mariano Santiago, who until last year had been the Marcos-appointed chairman of the country's Board of Transportation. To many Filipinos, the seizure of Channel 4 was one of the most remarkable events of an endlessly astonishing week.

Tuesday was the day of the twin inaugurations. Aquino had wanted a daylight ceremony because, as she said in her address, "it is fitting and proper that, as the rights and liberties of our people were taken away at midnight 14 years ago [when martial law was declared], the people should formally recover those rights and liberties in the full light of day." An hour later Ferdinand Marcos stepped onto the balcony at Malacañang Palace before a crowd of 4,000 cheering supporters and took the oath of office. "Whatever we have before us, we will overcome," he promised, while Imelda vowed to serve the people "all my life up to my last breath." Though she was choked with emotion, few people outside the palace sensed that this was to be the Marcoses'

farewell. Then the Marcoses sang favorite songs, at one point offering a duet to the cheers of the invited guests. Conspicuously absent was Marcos' Vice President, Arturo Tolentino, who later said that he had not wanted to take the oath of office because he hoped to play an intermediary role between Marcos and the reformists.

An hour after the ceremony, Marcos telephoned Enrile and demanded that he "stop firing at the palace." Enrile said he had no troops there. Marcos asked him to call Ambassador Bosworth to find out if the U.S. could provide the Marcoses with security in flying out of the palace. Enrile promised to do so. Marcos had previously raised the possibility of retiring to Ilocos Norte, his home province in the northern Philippines, but had been discouraged from doing so by his family and by the new government. At 9:05 p.m., four American helicopters picked up the President, Imelda and a contingent of relatives and aides, including General Ver, and flew them to the U.S. air base.

As the week ended, Reagan Administration policymakers breathed a great sigh of relief that their plans and strategies, so painstakingly worked out over the past two years, had gone so well. Both Republicans and Democrats praised the handling of the Philippine crisis. Officials counted themselves incredibly lucky. Noting that events had passed without appreciable bloodshed, a senior U.S. official in Washington ruefully remarked that the Lord surely looks after "fools, children, the Philippines and the U.S.A."

After its initial concern about how the inexperienced Corazon Aquino would fare as President, the Administration was

relieved that she gave important jobs to Laurel, Enrile, Ramos and other centrists, and adopted so conciliatory a tone toward her former opponents. Already there were hints of trouble ahead over the Marcoses' relocation, whether they decided to settle in Hawaii, California, New York or elsewhere, and over the legal status of Marcos' properties abroad. Though Marcos' only known income was his presidential salary of \$5,700 a year, the Central Intelligence Agency has reportedly estimated the value of his family's worldwide holdings at perhaps \$2 billion. New York's Democratic Congressman Stephen Solarz observed mildly last week, "There is a strong presumption that he had a very good financial adviser or acquired the millions of dollars he has through presumptively improper means." Aboard the plane that carried Marcos to Hawaii, federal authorities found \$1.2 million in Philippine currency, and another planeload of Marcos' personal effects arrived at week's end. Solarz said that while he thought it was appropriate for Reagan to offer Marcos sanctuary, the President had certainly not offered Marcos "immunity against civil proceedings brought by the government of the Philippines to recover a fortune stolen from the Philippines."

But for the moment the Administration was relieved to have passed the center of the storm. Even as he praised Marcos for his "difficult and courageous decision" to step down, Reagan congratulated Aquino on the "democratic outcome" of the elections and promised to work closely with her government in rebuilding the Philippine economy and armed forces.

—By William E. Smith,
Reported by Sandra Burton/Manila, and Johanna McGeary and William Stewart/Washington

FEBRUARY 26, 1986

EXILE IN HAWAII

Two and a half years after the murder of Benigno Aquino, an obviously ailing Ferdinand Marcos stepped out of a U.S. Air Force transport at Hickam Air Force Base, near Honolulu. His 20-year presidency was at an end. Only hours after being inaugurated for the last time, Marcos realized he had lost control of his own military and accepted an American offer of sanctuary.



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